

# Subservient service

by Laura Berawski  
News Editor

We as people have many differences that make us unique individuals. We have different views on life, various types of personalities and an array of annoying habits.

Through experience I have come across one of the commonalities we share. It envelops everyone in our society, proving to me to be an interesting topic of discussion.

The odd jobs that may be found "out there" help many of us to either touch on financial stability or provide us with sufficient funds to maintain a suitable lifestyle. As with anything in life, we live and learn to deal with such employment within various establishments. Depending on the circumstances, we sink or swim and face the consequences.

For the third consecutive summer I worked at a restaurant waiting on tables. I made many new friends and encountered many different people in regard to the customers who dined at my

workplace. I learned a lot from my summer job; especially from dealing with the public.

The Millcreek Mall is home to the fairly new Roadhouse Restaurant; a country-western steak house where fun times may be shared by all.

Over the summer a majority of the employees consisted of college students. We worked as a team; one unit functioning for the benefit of one another. All for one and one for all. (Most of us did anyway.) Therefore we had no major difficulties getting along with each other.

The issue that I found to be one of the loopholes at the restaurant dealt with the customers.

First of all, a fun and friendly atmosphere designed to keep everyone happy- even the employees- was to be maintained. Secondly, our policy of "100% guest satisfaction 100% of the time" was executed rather well.

What ticked the servers off a lot was the poor percentage of gratuity left behind from the folks who ventured to the Roadhouse for a solid meal.

(Gratuity, or, "lack thereof.")

Let's think about this "tip" thing for a moment. I have always been taught to leave at least 15% for the server(s); depending upon the quality of the service, I might leave more, I might leave less. I have been taught that this percentage is a



norm in our society. Thus, tipping under 15% is a sign of either inadequate service, or that the customer is downright ignorant and/or rude.

In addition to my education in etiquette, I have been taught that if I cannot afford to go out to

dinner feeling comfortable with spending some cash for a satisfying meal plus proper gratuity, then I should either go to Taco Bell or stay at home and prepare dinner myself.

Part of being served dinner at a restaurant is reciprocating with an appropriate gratuity. I can't tell you how many times servers, including myself, have either been tipped less than 10% or stuffed completely.

How rude. We ran our butts off and racked our brains for next to nothing.

There were many customers who visited our restaurant, plus the regulars who knew "how to tip." They made waiting tables a lucrative, worthwhile job.

I'm sure it's the same in any restaurant. It's not right. I currently work on weekends and many of my friends still work up to five nights a week while attending school as full-time students.

Waiting tables is a major source of income for many other people too. People working in restaurants run their butts off nearly 100% of the time; mostly

on busier nights including the weekends. Customers need to realize what's going on. I'd rather be left empty handed than make \$1.50 off of a \$45 guest check. That's insulting.

One of my co-workers took action against an act of ignorance. She was tipped one lousy dollar bill for a fifty-some dollar guest check. Her table was nice and courteous; she couldn't believe she wasn't tipped well. After finding the dollar bill she chased her customers into the parking lot. She said, "keep your dollar," while giving it back. I don't blame her.

For all the tips I've made, I'm grateful. For all the tips I will encounter in the future, let's hope they're some good ones. For all the tips I never received, I'd like to leave some of my own for you:

If you're not going to tip accordingly, don't go out to eat. If you do go out and do not plan to tip accordingly, I don't want to wait on you; you're not worth it.

# Friendly 'Customer Service'

## How to gain their attention

by Dave Barry  
Syndicated Columnist

TODAY'S CONSUMER TOPIC IS: How to resolve a dispute with a large company.

If you're a typical consumer -- defined as "a consumer whose mail consists mainly of offers for credit cards that he or she already has" -- chances are sooner or later you're going to have a dispute with a large company. You're going to call the company up, and you're going to wind up speaking with people in a department with a friendly name such as "Customer Service." These people hate you.

I don't mean they hate you PERSONALLY. They hate the public in general, because the public is forever calling them up to complain.

I know whereof I speak. I used to be -- I am not proud of this -- a newspaper editor. This was at a paper in West Chester, Pa., called -- I am not proud of this, either -- the "Daily Local News." We came out daily, and we specialized in local news. For example, if Richard M. Nixon resigned the presidency, we'd send reporters out to the shopping mall to badger randomly selected shoppers into

having an opinion about this, and our big headline would be, LOCAL RESIDENTS REACT TO NIXON RESIGNATION. As though they really were reacting to it, as opposed to trying to find the right color bedsheets. This is basically how we handled all news (LOCAL RESIDENTS REACT TO DISCOVERY THAT CLAMS MATE FOR LIFE).

So one spring day I made the editorial decision to put a photograph of some local ducks on the front page. At least I thought they were local ducks, and that's what I called them in the caption. But it turns out that they were geese. I know this because a WHOLE lot of irate members of the public called to tell me so. They never called about, say, the quality of the schools, but they were RABID about the duck vs. goose issue. It was almost as bad as when we left out the horoscope.

I tried explaining to the callers that, hey, basically a goose is just a big duck, but this did not placate them. Some of them demanded that we publish a correction (For whom? The geese?), and by the end of the day I was convinced that the public consisted entirely of raging idiots. (This is the

fundamental underlying assumption of journalism.)

This is what people who answer the phone at, for example, the electric company, go through every day. I don't mean that they get an endless stream of calls from people who are furious that their electricity



got turned off just because they failed to pay their bill for 297 consecutive months, or people asking questions like is it OK to operate a microwave in the bathtub.

So let's say that you have a genuine problem with your electric bill. The people in "Customer Service" have no way of knowing that you're an intelligent, rational person.

They're going to lump you in with the shining non-rocket-scientist public. As far as they're concerned, the relevant facts, in any dispute between you and them, are these:

1. They have a bunch of electricity.
2. You need it.
3. So shut up.

This is why, more and more, the people in "Customer Service" won't even talk to you. They prefer to let you interface with the convenient Automated Answering System until such time as you die of old age ("... if your FIRST name has more than eight letters, and your LAST name begins with 'H' through 'L' press 251 NOW. If your first name has less than eight letters, and your last name contains at least two 'E's, press 252 NOW. If your ...").

So is there any way that you, the lowly consumer, can gain the serious attention of a large and powerful business? I am pleased to report that there IS a way, which I found out about thanks to alert reader Jim Ganz, Jr., who sent me an Associated Press news report from Russia. According to this report, a Russian electric company got into a billing dispute with a customer and cut off the

customer's electricity. This customer, however, happened to be a Russian army arsenal. So the commander ordered a tank to drive over the electric company's office and aim its gun at the windows. The electricity was turned right back on.

On behalf of consumers everywhere, I want to kiss this arsenal commander on the lips. I mean, what a GREAT concept. Imagine, as a consumer, how much more seriously your complaint would be taken if you were complaining from inside an armored vehicle capable of reducing the entire "Customer Service" department to tiny smoking shards. What I am saying is: Forget the Automated Answering System. Get a tank.

Perhaps you are thinking: "But a tank costs several million dollars, not including floor mats. I don't have that kind of money."

Don't be silly. You're a consumer, right? You have credit cards, right?

Perhaps you are thinking: "yes, but how am I going to pay the credit card company?"

Don't be silly. You have a tank, right?